

**+ Ezekiel 2:1-3:4 + Faithfulness Is Job #1! + 7th Sunday after Pentecost + 15 July 2012 +**

In 1982, Ford Motor Company started using an ad slogan that caught on for almost two decades—"Quality is Job One". It was everywhere you saw the Ford brand. Ford wanted to convince consumers that it produced quality vehicles and to remind its workers that "quality" was most important. No matter what you think about Ford cars and trucks, it's hard to forget the slogan. It simply identifies and emphasizes what was their highest priority, what was "job one" as they produced a variety of automobiles.

Now what would say is "job one" in the life of a Christian? Love for God and others? Serving God and others? Worship? Studying God's Word? How about faithfulness to God and his Word? Now faithfulness may not be the first thing that pops in your mind when you think about a Christian's priorities, but as God calls Ezekiel to serve as his prophet, he makes it very clear what he wants as your #1 priority—**FAITHFULNESS IS JOB #1!**

Ezekiel had hoped to become a priest serving in God's temple, but God had other plans. Ezekiel was among those who were carried off into exile by the Babylonians. He was a thousand miles from home and he'd never be a priest, but the Lord had plans for his servant. With an appearance so glorious Ezekiel fell to the ground, God called him to be his prophet.

***"Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.' As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me."*** You wonder what was going through Ezekiel's mind. Here the Lord of heaven and earth was calling him to be his prophet—a task given to a rare few in the Old Testament. If Ezekiel harbored any thoughts of pride in being chosen as God's prophet, that all changed when God gave him the message he was to proclaim—***"lament and mourning and woe"***, and then God identified the people to whom he would go—***"to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me."*** Ezekiel was to proclaim God's hard truth to a people who had openly rejected him. Ezekiel would have to face their opposition, their rejection, and perhaps even their persecution. Oh, and God required that **faithfulness is job #1!**

God wasn't sending Ezekiel to proclaim his Word to people who were eager to hear that Word. No, consider how God describes them. ***"Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn."*** You don't usually use words like ***"rebellious"***, ***"obstinate"***, or ***"stubborn"*** to describe those who are loving, kind, and eager to listen, but this is how God described Ezekiel's own people—people with whom he had grown up, people with backgrounds similar to his own, people he knew! To these people Ezekiel would have to condemn their stubborn rebellion against God's holy will and call them to turn from their sins. He would also point them to the coming Messiah, who would come to forgive their sins, but most would reject that message and God's prophet.

Even today the Word of God is a message that's usually hard for people to hear and increasingly a message that causes vehement opposition. People don't want to hear what God commands regarding his gifts of sex and marriage, his high value of life from the unborn to the aged, or his command that he gets first priority in our lives and with all the gifts he gives us.

Remaining faithful to the Word of God without compromise is no easy task. It's not easy when you have to deal with the rejection or opposition of family members or close friends who don't understand why you believe what you do or why you avoid doing what's popular. It's not easy when your relationship with co-workers or classmates gets awkward because you disagree with what they say or do or think because it's contrary to what God says in his Word. It's even more difficult when those who call themselves Christians oppose you on grounds that are not Scriptural, but because they've been swept along by human emotion or by what's popular.

Above all, you and I have difficulty hearing that message ourselves, because even we could be numbered in that ***"rebellious nation"***. Inside every one of us is a sinful nature that has been ***"in revolt"*** against God's holy will from the moment of conception. By nature, none of us is anything more than ***"obstinate...stubborn"*** children who hate God's holy will because we think it prevents us from being truly "free" to do whatever we want. By nature, every one of us deserves to hear that message of eternal condemnation that God commissioned his prophet to proclaim.

Yet God's Word is still a message every one of us needs to hear. Think about this for a moment. Why would God bother calling a specific prophet to proclaim a specific message of condemnation to an already condemned people? It was because God cared about every single one of their souls. Yes, in unbelief they rebelled against him and were headed for hell, but God wanted them to turn from their sins and live. God wanted to reconcile himself with them. That's why God called Ezekiel to proclaim that hard message and required him to remain faithful to his Word. ***"Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen...they will know that a prophet has been among them."***

Even as the Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem and hauling her citizens off into exile, God was showing them his grace one more time. For that same reason, God sent all his prophets and apostles, and still sends pastors and teachers out into the spiritual war zones of our world. That's why he even sends you. God in his grace wants sinners to turn from their sins and live. It all starts with listening to that hard message that condemns sin as sin and condemns hearts like yours and mine because every single one of us has rebelled against God's holy Law. Then with that same Word of God, he provides healing with the only message that really heals—the good news of Jesus our Savior, God's Son whom he sent to reconcile this sinful world to himself and forgive our stubborn rebellion. That's the only way God could reconcile himself to us. Sin had to be punished, but God loved you so much that he punished his own Son in your place. We all need to hear that!

Now if people need to hear this Word, you and I need to faithfully share it, but we need some assurance from God and he doesn't let us down. **"...Son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words...Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house."** If you're going to remain faithful to God's Word, what will take away the fear of opposition and rejection? God's promise—**"Do not be afraid"** and the underlying promise that he is going to be with you every step of the way no matter what happens. Six hundred years after Ezekiel, Jesus made the same promise to his disciples when he sent them out to proclaim his Word. He said, **"Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age"** (Matthew 28:20b). Jesus has made good on that promise ever since as he grants his protection and blessing, even providing willing ears to listen to his Word when you share it.

If faithfulness is "job #1" in the life of a Christian, then how do you get started with that challenging task? You have God's promises. You have a message that every single person needs to hear, but ultimately faithfulness to the Word starts with you. At the end of our text, we're told of a rather strange episode. God commands Ezekiel to literally eat the scroll of his word. Ezekiel tells us, **"So I ate it and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth."**

God wanted Ezekiel to realize that for him to faithfully proclaim the Word, it had to become part of him first. You need to consume God's Word yourself too, although no fork or knife is needed. That means you need to be in the Word of God. Your sinful nature needs to be cut and killed with God's holy Law that condemns you for your own sinful rebellion. Then you need the good news of Jesus to heal and raise you to new life. Through Jesus, all your sins are forgiven. You have been reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus, and now heaven is guaranteed because Jesus abandoned his tomb.

In the Word, you taste and see that the Lord is good. Here you find reconciliation for your rebellion, forgiveness for your stubborn disobedience, peace for your troubled heart, comfort for your sorrow, healing for your suffering, and life for your death. All of that and so much more is here in God's Word. When you consume the Word, it becomes part of who you are. You can understand why the Word was so sweet to Ezekiel and why it causes you so much joy, because here you find not only the holy God, but the God of grace, who took on your human flesh to be reconciled with you.

If God's Word tastes so good, why wouldn't you want to consume it every day of your life? Nothing else tastes so good and is so good for your soul. You see, when you consume that Word for yourself, not only does it become part of who you are, but it becomes your life. After the Lord had Ezekiel eat the scroll, God told him, **"Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them."** When you leave here today, God isn't sending you to Ezekiel's people. He's sending you to your own.

For them and for him, God wants you to live his Word. He wants you to remain faithful to his Word in the choices you make, the places you go, the shows and movies you watch, the sites you visit, the language you use, and the words you speak. He wants you to live and share that message of God's faithfulness in every area of your life with your children and your spouse, when you go to work or school, when you're out in the community and here at church. God has given his Word to you to do something with it. See what Jesus did with it. In every aspect of his life, he always remained faithful to his Word. Yes, he faced opposition even to the point of death, but it was all for your sake. For you he faithfully lived and proclaimed that Word! With his help, you can be faithful to that Word in every aspect of your life too!

Faithfulness to God's Word is "job one" for you as a Christian. Even though it's no easy task, God has attached his promises guaranteed in blood and an empty tomb, and from that faithfulness flows everything else you do and think and say as a Christian. God has remained faithful to his promises to you. May he keep you ever faithful to him and his Word! Amen.